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UNCLAS ALMATY 002367

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CACEN (J. MUDGE) AND DRL/PHD (P. DAVIS, C. KUCHTA-HELBLING)

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM PHUM PINR KZ POLITICAL
SUBJECT: CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION SCHEDULES EXPERIMENTAL ELECTION OF DISTRICT AKIMS

REF: ALMATY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Central Election Commission announced on June 21 that four district akims will be chosen by local, directly elected legislatures (maslikhats) on August 12. This pattern mirrors the selection of national senators by oblast level maslikhats (Reftel). Until now, akims had been appointed by the President or the higher-level akim. Political observers have long called for direct election of akims as a key tool in dismantling government corruption. These elections, though they will not be widespread and will be subject to tight executive control, represent a small concession towards greater local self-determination and public accountability. END SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

¶2. (U) "Akim" is a generic Kazakh term denoting the leader of a unit of government: from the oblast level, where akims are roughly equivalent to state governors, to the aul (village) level, where they are equivalent to small town mayors. Each akim leads a local administration called an akimat. District akims are a step down from oblast akims; the position approximates that of a county executive. Until now, all akims, from the oblast level down, have been appointed by the President or a higher-level akim.

LOGISTICS

¶3. (U) On June 21, the Central Election Commission ("CEC") announced that akims in four districts would be chosen by direct election on August 12. The CEC is implementing President Nazarbayev's decree of December 6, 2004, and his February 2005 annual address to the nation, during which he reiterated his support for local election of akims. The districts selected for this trial are Yeskeldy district in Almatinskaya Oblast in the southeastern part of the country near Almaty; Kokpekty district in Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast; Zhangaly district in the Western Kazakhstan Oblast; and Timiriazev district in the Northern Kazakhstan Oblast. The CEC was careful to choose one district from each corner of the country. Akims in these districts will be elected for a 4-year term.

¶4. (U) The CEC has set the following schedule for the experimental elections: oblast akims will nominate candidates from June 27 to July 12; the CEC will register eligible nominees from July 2 until July 17; and candidates may actively campaign from the time of their registration until midnight August 10. After the maslikhats vote on August 12, district election commissions will register the winner not later than August 16, and file election results with the oblast akim who is to issue a formal order appointing the elected akim.

BALANCE OF POWER: DISTRICT MASLIKHATS VERSUS OBLAST AKIMS
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¶5. (SBU) By controlling the nomination process, oblast akims and Astana still retain a significant hand in district akim elections. However, the oblast akim does not appear to have independent authority to override the final choice of the maslikhat or to dismiss the district akim. The oblast akim must obtain the maslikhat's approval to remove the district akim, offering a small check on the oblast akim's power.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) The akimat structure has been heavily criticized by the opposition and international observers as a quasi-feudal system that encourages systematic corruption by government officials. While not direct elections in the strictest sense, the delegation of some power to local maslikhats represents some concession to calls for greater public accountability and local control over district-level

affairs. Moving away, however, from a top-down nomination
process will be a more difficult step, and Astana's leaders
will almost certainly proceed cautiously in further
loosening their grip on control of local affairs,

particularly in the wake of events in Uzbekistan and
Kyrgyzstan.

¶7. (U) Minimize for Dushanbe considered.

ORDWAY

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